

## Everything Has Changed by Janaynay

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**Summary:**

It was a moment of weakness and she hadn't meant to do it. Now El's decision could change everything.

# Everything Has Changed

## Author's Note:

My first fan fiction ever! I just couldn't get this idea out of my head and here we are. Set 5-6 years after season 2. I love these two kids and their love for each other so so much.

*This was a bad idea*, El thought, feeling her stomach flip around with nerves.

She had picked this spot in Mirkwood hoping it would bring her comfort, but now that she was here she feared she was just going to taint a happy place with bad memories. That, or with her lunch, which was currently giving a valiant effort to exit her body.

She leaned against the tree in an attempt to ground herself, and took a deep breath through her nose. The smell of damp leaves distracted her momentarily as she tried to settle her stomach, willing the familiar smell and sights of these woods to comfort her. It seemed to work and she looked around, eyes lingering on the scenery, taking it all in.

She took in a another shaky breath, pulling her thin jacket tighter around herself as she squinted in the fading sunlight, somehow at its brightest though at the cusp of its descent for the day. It was unseasonably warm for November, but she shivered nonetheless, more from nerves than the cold.

Turning slightly, she traced her fingers along the carving on the tree, the outline of a heart. Her lips pulled into a smile as she traced the E, the plus sign, and then the M. Guilt pooled in her stomach as her hand lingered over the M a moment longer and she swallowed hard.

It was selfish of her to want to meet him here. It was *so* selfish. But it had to be here - she couldn't think of any other place. She wanted to take it all in one last time.

She glanced down at her watch. She was early; it was only 3-5-5. She

still said it like that after all these years, even though she knew the right way. Old habits were hard to break, it seemed, and this was just what she said secretly to herself. Kind of like how she murmured *pee-oh-pul* under her breath whenever she wrote out the word "people," something else Mike had taught her. *"It's just a little trick I do to help me remember how to spell it,"* he had said, his cheeks flushing slightly at the admission. He was always such a good teacher. He was always so good.

The crunch of leaves in the distance caused El to turn her head towards the sound, pulling her from her memories. There he was, right on time, his raven hair shining in the sunlight as it peeked through the trees. Her breath caught at the sight of him, it always did; pale skin, dark eyes, eyelashes and limbs for days. He looked like home, and she curled her hands into fists, nails prodding the skin of her palms to steady herself.

His eyes lit up at the sight of her and his mouth broke into a smile, a smile she returned as best she could. It wasn't convincing though, and his eyes dimmed and his lips dipped into a tight line for a moment.

It made her want to run into his arms. But she stayed by the tree.

"Hey," he said, moving to hug her. He rested his chin on the top of her head and she swallowed her guilt long enough to properly hug him back. Her hands trembled, but not from the cold.

"It's been awhile," he murmured into her hair when she didn't respond, one arm leaving her waist. She pulled away and saw him grinning at their initials carved on the tree. "How many years ago was that by now?"

She couldn't help but smile for real. "We were 14 so...must be almost 6," she said, joining him in tracing the carving, again lost in her memories.

"Six years and this scar hasn't faded much," he chuckled, examining his left thumb. A silvery white line on the knuckle was visible even against his pale skin. "I would've carved the year on here too if I had been more, uh, handy with the knife."

"The price you pay for romance," she said, teasing.

"Hey, it was worth it," he said, smiling down at her fondly. His expression changed as he looked at her, his chocolate brown eyes earnest and his voice suddenly serious. "It's always been worth it, El. All of it."

Her heart clenched at his sincerity, and fresh guilt hit her in a wave. She wanted to hold him, to lose herself in his closeness but she took a step away from him, away from the tree.

He cleared his throat, fiddling nervously with the hem of his sweater, looking unsure. "El? What's going on? Why did you want to meet here instead of at your place?" He raised his eyebrows, trying to wiggle them playfully, but he still seemed nervous, obviously reading her demeanor. He knew her too well. "Just to tease me about one of my many failed romantic gestures?"

She wanted to stall, she wanted to get lost in memories and reminisce and have anything but this conversation but she knew she couldn't wait any longer. It wasn't fair to him. It wasn't fair to herself.

She took a breath.

"It's about what happened with Holly. I - I messed up."

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It was a moment of weakness and she hadn't meant to do it. It was purely instinct.

El had kept her abilities to herself for so many years as she lived a normal life in Hawkins. Intrigued as the community had been at the sudden and somewhat scandalous appearance of Jim Hopper's teenage daughter, interest and attention had died down soon enough, allowing El to experience the normalcy she craved but had never known. As the years went by she was simply part of the scenery, an ordinary thread woven into the tapestry of the town, and El wouldn't want it any other way. She was safe. She was normal. She was happy.

But that had gone to hell in a moment of chaos, a moment she hadn't

meant to control.

It had been like any other Halloween. Past the age of trick or treating for a few years now, Mike and El had been tasked with chaperoning Holly and her friends as they hiked through the neighborhood. Though he would complain fervently to anyone who asked, El knew Mike didn't really mind. He always scored some candy from the neighbors and claimed that any night spent walking hand in hand with "the most beautiful girl in Hawkins" was never a night wasted.

It was getting late and most of the kids had called it quits, the streets and sidewalks empty.

"Just one more house. *PLEASE*, El-Bell?" Holly had said, giving doe eyes that rivaled the one she directed them to. El couldn't resist the girl on a normal day, let alone on her favorite night of the year. "Okay, Holly. One more," she said, unable to keep a smile from her face as Mike rolled his eyes good naturedly, shaking his head at the two of them.

It all happened so fast. One second the street was empty, the next, a car came flying toward them as they crossed. Something was wrong, it was moving too fast and showed no intention of slowing down, veering all over the road. Mike called out, but Holly stood frozen in place on the asphalt, stunned, staring at the headlights of the car.

The car was about to make impact when suddenly it flew through the air, over Holly's head, and slammed into the pavement on the other side. It crashed into the pole of a street light, the front of the car smoking as it screeched to an abrupt stop.

Holly's friends looked at the wrecked car in horror, clutching each other, Halloween candy forgotten and scattered at their feet. But Holly stared directly at the girl standing by her brother, her arm stretched out, hand tense, ferocity in her eyes and a stream of blood dripping down her nose.

Mike had caught her as she fell, drained and in shock from the sudden effort, lowering her gently onto the curb. He looked into her eyes, worry and awe on his face, waiting until she nodded before running to embrace his sister. El would never forget the look on

Holly's face as she stared at her from Mike's embrace for as long as she lived.

She hadn't meant to do it. But it was Holly. She had to. She *had* to.

And now she had to live with the consequences.

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"Mike, I have to leave. There's too much talk, too many rumors about that night..."

He ran his hand through his dark hair in frustration. "But didn't Hopper say the driver was drunk? He was. So he doesn't remember it anyway. And the rest is just a story from a few 10 year old kids."

She bit her lip, fighting tears. "I know. And dad thought he could contain this, but he thinks it's just too hot right now. Too many people are talking. And if people are talking..."

"...then *he's* out there listening," Mike finished, realization blooming into horror on his face.

They looked at each other, and he reached for her then as she trembled. She let him hold her, hesitantly at first, but then she clung to him as if she would fall apart if he didn't hold her together. It wasn't that far from the truth.

He held her as though she contained all the breath for his lungs, pulling her closer to him as he buried a hand in her hair, the other balled in the back of her jacket. She buried her face in his neck, gasping slightly as she held back sobs. He pulled her closer and closer, as if they could become one entity, as if she could pass through him if he tried.

"I hate that he's still out there. I hate that he still threatens your safety, that he ruins your life!" Mike spat through clenched teeth.

El swallowed a sob, willing herself not to cry. Not now. She felt guilty enough, and didn't want to make it worse for him by crying. This was difficult enough as it was.

"I know," she choked out instead. She could feel him shaking with rage, feel his heart thudding through his chest, the thought of her being taken or killed too much for him. She pulled back slightly, as much as he would let her, sliding her arms comfortably down his own to uncurl his fists and take his hands.

"I hate that I feel so powerless," he sighed, and she realized then that his face was wet with tears. "All I want to do is save you. I mean, you've saved us all so many times, and you saved Hol, and because of that you're suddenly at risk..."

She reached up and cupped his face, swiping a thumb across his freckles, wiping at tears.

"Mike," she said, returning her hands to his, lifting his knuckles to her mouth and brushing her lips across them gently. His eyes met hers, and she wanted to sink and drown and die in the depth of them. In those beautiful eyes and all the emotion that poured from them.

She squeezed his hand twice. He squeezed back three times without hesitation, completing the wordless communication they developed as kids and still used with surprising regularity.

"Mike," she said again, staring at their hands, "you don't have to save me."

He looked at her, and then looked away, shame coloring his features. "I know. I know. I just wish I could try."

She wanted to tell him that he already saved her. That he saved her eight years ago in this very spot in the pouring rain. That he saved her every time he called for her in their 353 days apart. That he saved her from every nightmare and bad memory and doubt and fear she encountered for the last 8 years. That he taught her to love, and saved her heart, her soul.

But there wasn't time for that, and the guilt of what she was about to say was eating at her so badly she had to let go of his perfect, warm hands and look at the ground.

"You don't have to save me," she said, "but would you run away with

me?"

His head shot up as his eyes locked on hers. He stared at her for a moment, then spoke, his voice resolute.

"Yes."

She stumbled forward slightly, wanting to touch him, but crippled by guilt. "Mike, are you sure? Hop thinks I should stay away for at least six months, maybe a year until this blows over. Until we're sure Pap-" she corrected herself, "until *Brenner* is a non-issue," she rattled quickly.

"El..."

"Hop has a buddy in Canada that has a place to stay at for a while until things get figured out, but oh Mike, are you sure? I can't believe I've asked you to do this!"

"El -"

"I mean, I didn't want to ask you because I knew you'd say yes. I knew you would," she said, giving in finally, feeling hot tears streaming down her face. "But it's so unfair of me to ask. To ask you to leave Hawkins, leave your family, leave your friends, your education, your future..."

"El!" His hands gripped her shoulders, stopping her in her tracks. She didn't even realize she was pacing. He moved his hands up to gently cup her face.

"El...of course I'm coming with you." His voice was as gentle as his hands, his breath a whisper on her face. "Where else would I go, if not with you?"

His eyes never left her face and she gazed at him just as boldly before melting into his touch. She reached up and put her hands over the ones cupping her face, lightly squeezing them twice. He responded by bending to kiss her softly on the lips three times.

"I'm not going to let you be alone again, ever, okay? Ever," he said, pressing his forehead against hers, his voice firm. And then, his tone



lighter: "You can't get rid of me that easily."

"Promise?" she whispered.

"Promise."

El stood on her toes, tilting her chin, and closed the gap between them, sealing their promise with a kiss.

"Thank you," Mike breathed when their lips finally parted, his mouth still so close to her own that his lips just brushed hers as he spoke, sending electricity through her. He intended to kiss her again but then she spoke, her brain finally catching up.

"Thank you? For what?"

He smiled, bumping her nose with his own. "For asking me to come with you."

"Mike," she pulled back, shaking her head and sending her curls bouncing. "Don't thank me for being selfish."

"Hey, I want to go with you. I *want* to," he said, not a hint of anger in his voice, only sincerity. He slid a hand into her hair, his thumb smoothing her cheek, his other hand remaining secure on her waist. "If you're being selfish, I am too. I'm way too selfish to be without you again. I'm way too selfish to let you go."

She considered his words, her heart swelling in her chest. She felt herself drowning in those dark eyes again, only this time she let herself. Those eyes were a safe place to fall; those eyes looked like home. He always knew what to say. Mike. Her Mike.

He was always so good.

### **Author's Note:**

You may have recognized a few Taylor Swift lyrics in there. They just happened but here are the songs as a reference:

Everything has Changed - title

Call it What You Want - "you don't have to save me,  
but would you run away with me? Yes."  
Gorgeous - "I think that I might sink and drown and  
die."

Thank you for reading!